

THE FACE OF THE HOPEWELL

by
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Of all of the objects that prehistoric culture might produce, there seems a special attraction when it comes to the human face. This magnificent human head, pictured in figures 1-6, was among the many artistically crafted artifacts excavated from the Ohio-Hopewell mounds. It was part of Squier and Davis's Collection, and is now in the British Museum.

The Museum's photographs reveal this Hopewell sculpture in wonderful detail. There are many neatly carved elements of this ancient face—most notably the substantial amount of body ornamentation, including tattoos, ear spools and a head-dress—that make it a piece of great interest.

British Museum notes place the artifact with the Hopewell Culture in the Woodland period (1000 B.C. to 1000 A.D.), and state that the sculpture was excavated from Mound City, Mound 8. Museum notes also relate that it was made of "light coloured pipe stone." It measures 3.6 centimeters in length, 3.3 centimeters in width, and 4.3 centimeters in height. The notes also describe the piece as a "Fragment of an effigy smoking pipe carved into the form of a man's head, heavily tattooed, with one ear surviving bearing a large piercing ... Above the ear a green patina has developed."

Barbara Harkness, who studied artifacts from Squier and Davis's collection at the British Museum in the 1980's, provided three additional photographs of the sculpture that she took (figures 7, 8 & 9). Harkness calls the artifact a sculpture and not an effigy pipe. She believes that it more likely depicts an iconic figure rather than any specific individual, commenting that "It is my view that it is a shaman, but far less representational than an iconographic statement."

The many details adorning the head and face are of particular interest. There are multiple tattoo lines carved at highlighted points of the face, including the looping tattoos under each eye and around the mouth and chin. The tattooing is especially incised underneath the eyes. Harkness remarked that "The element seen around the eyes of the 'shaman' are a tri-lobed example of what I called 'an expanded loop.'" However, as to their possible meaning, she cautions that "Elements can be used to convey many differing intentions." The sculpture appears to wear a copper ear spool on at least one side—the other side being damaged. Copper Hopewell ear spools are typically circular shaped and may vary in size. Figure 10 shows sketches of typical copper ear pools as depicted in Morehead's *The*

Hopewell Mound Group of Ohio.

The head dress is another curious feature of the sculpture. It can clearly be seen in the rear and three quarter views of both the Museum's photographs of the sculpture and in those by Harkness. Squier and Davis called the headdress "remarkable." And they speculate the head-dress as a kind of "lappet or fold which seems detached from other portions of the head-dress simply resting on the crown."

However, the head-dress depicted on the sculpture resembles a type found in other Ohio mounds. Figures 11 & 12 from Warren Morehead's *The Hopewell Mound Group of Ohio* show two examples of such a head dress or "head plate" with antlers. This type was made from a piece of curved wood that was covered in copper sheets. Morehead describes such a copper head dress were made from a piece of carved wood covered copper:

The head had been decorated with a remarkable head-dress of wood and copper. The mass of copper in the center was originally in the form of a semi-circle reaching from the lower jaw to the crown of the head.

Morehead also cites Willoughby's description of the head plates:

The head-plate ... covered the head from the forehead to the base of the skull, and branching antlers probably rose perpendicularly. In the construction of the antlers the aboriginal artisan first selected limbs having the proper curve and the required number of branches similarly arranged. These were cut to a suitable form and carefully covered with thin copper.

As the 2000 year old copper artifacts are well oxidized, it is not easy to picture an individual wearing such an adornment. A head-plate of copper may have looked quite impressive—especially if the copper were polished—perhaps reminiscent of scenes in the Iliad where heroes are described as appearing in "gleaming bronze." In figure 13, concept artist Nick Siegfert has sketched how a person might have appeared wearing a copper head plate.

Whether iconic or a specific individual, how impressive he must have appeared with the dark tattooed markings, and a polished head-plate and ear spools. The particular level of detail, especially stressed in this shiny body ornamentation, suggests some importance or status to this magnificent figure—whether it was intended to de-

pict a specific individual or it was intended to be a representative figure.

Interestingly, Harkness offers one idea about the sculpture. She notes suggestions of feline features in both the tattoos and face of this piece, and that it recalls another Hopewell human head—one that has some prominent cat-like features. She suggested that "The nose may be more feline than portrait... as well as the angled lines around the mouth (simulated whiskers?) She also notes that the "Eyes on the 'shaman' recall the slit eyes of alert felines." Figure 14 shows a line drawing feline pipe depicted in *Ancient Monuments*. The use of feline imagery in Native American cultures has been discussed in several publications, including Nicholas Saunders' *Icons of Power: Feline Symbolism in the Americas*.

Whatever the interpretation, the Hopewell sculpture is an artifact that attracts interest. Somehow, a face seems to provide a closer connection with the Hopewell than other pieces from this prehistoric culture. It is a delight to see fresh images of this wonderful object from Ohio's past.

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Figures 1, 2, 3 (Rusnak)
Three views of the human
head sculpture excavated
from Mound Number 8 at
Mound City by Squier
and Davis in the 1840s.
Once part of the Squier
and Davis collection, it
was sold along with the
balance of the collection
to the Blackmoor Museum
in England, and is now
in the British Museum.





Figures 4, 5, 6 (Rusnak)
Side, front, and rear views of the
sculpture. Green stains indicate
presence of a copper ornament.
(British Museum Photos)



Figures 7, 8, 9 (Rusnak)
Side, back and front
views of sculpture taken
by Barbara Harkness at
the British Museum.

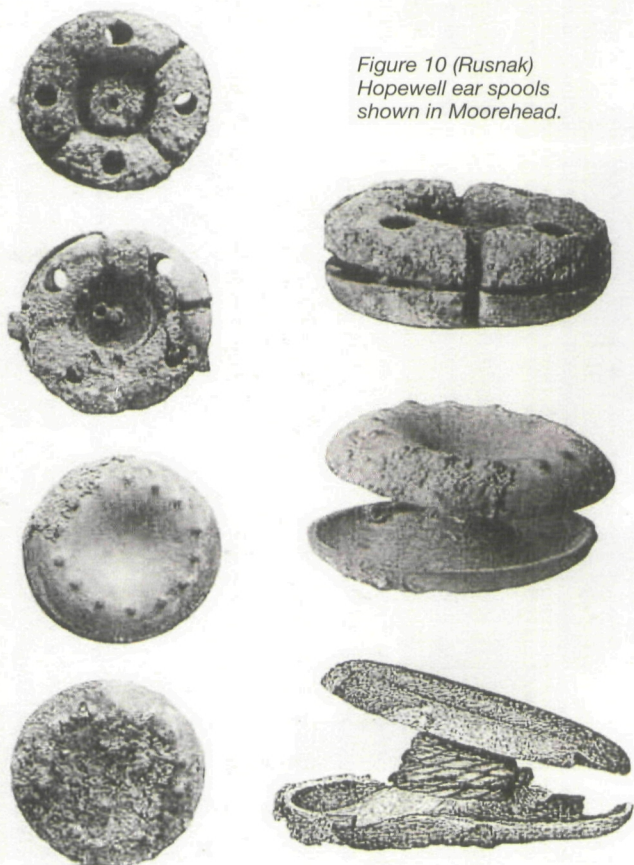
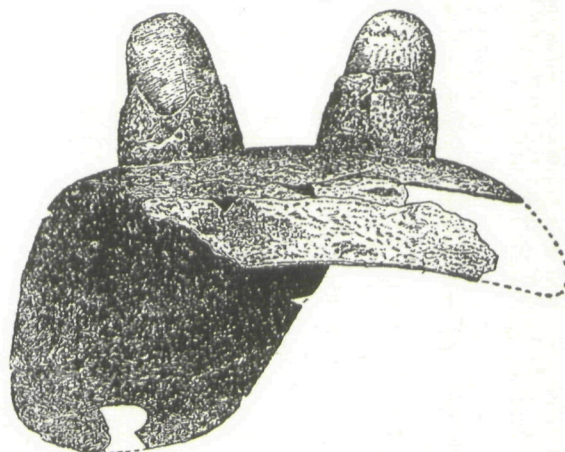
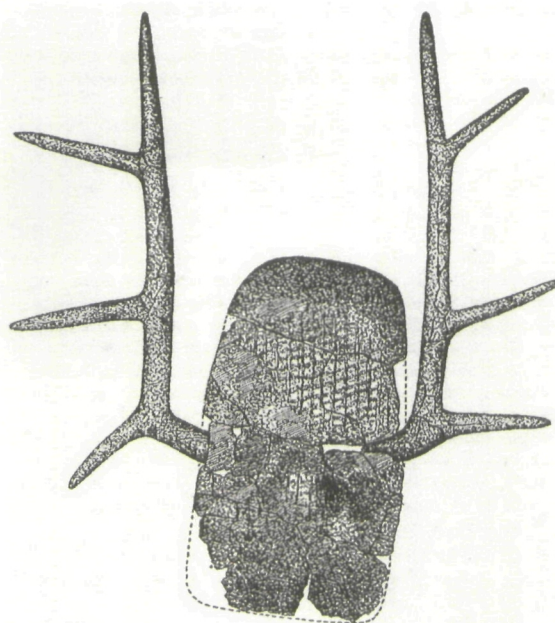


Figure 10 (Rusnak)
Hopewell ear spools
shown in Moorehead.



Figures 11 & 12 (Rusnak)
Two copper headdresses as
pictured in Morehead's Hopewell
Mound Group of Ohio.

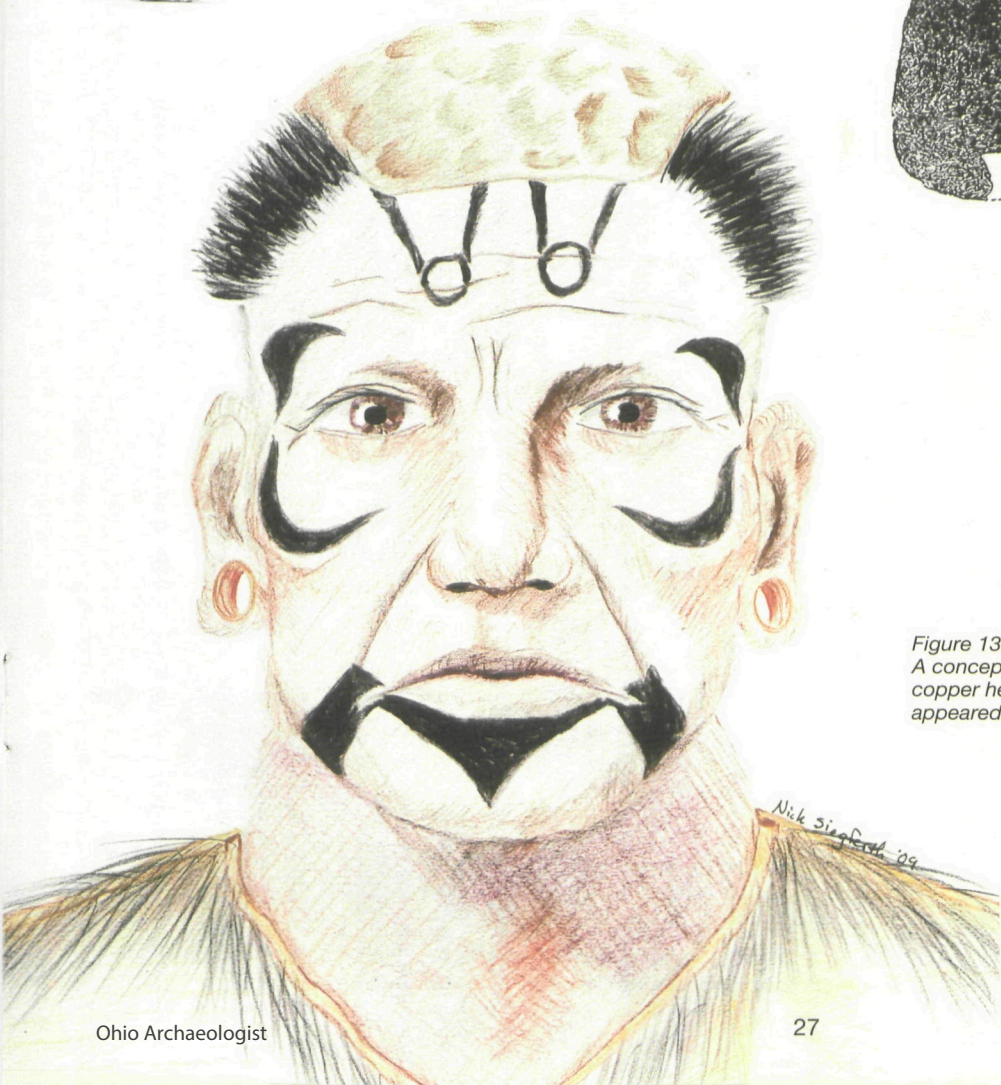


Figure 13 (Rusnak)
A concept of how a polished
copper headdress might have
appeared by artist Nick Siegfert.

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Figure 14 (Rusnak) Feline-like effigy as shown in Squier and Davis

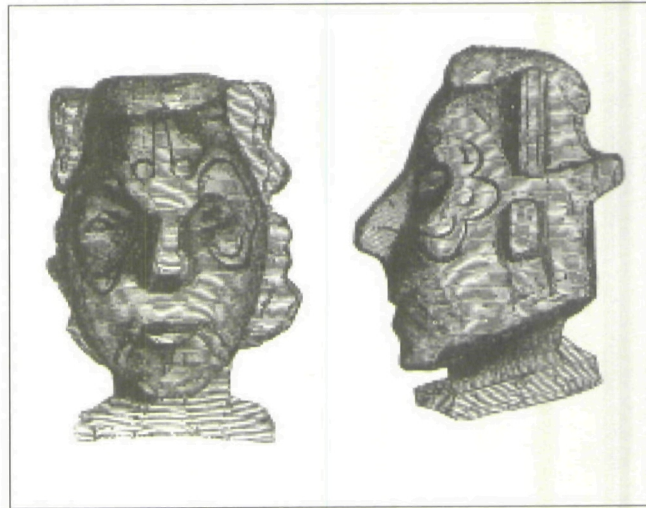
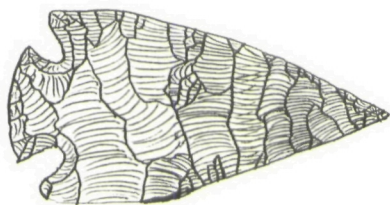


Fig. 15 (Rusnak) Sculpture as shown in Squier and Davis

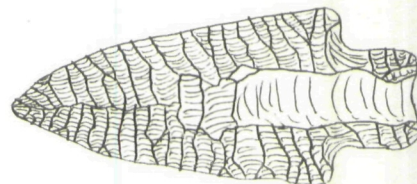
Squier and Davis Collection

As is well documented, Ephraim Squier and Edwin Davis, the authors of *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*, excavated a number of animal effigy pipes and other artifacts from the Hopewell Culture from Ohio mounds before 1860. As was discussed in a previous article, much of their collection was purchased by William Blackmore of Salisbury, England in 1864 for \$10,000, and later acquired by the British Museum in 1931.

Photographs and catalog data of many of these extraordinary artifacts are now available on the British Museum's website <http://www.british-museum.org/>. Simply clicking the "research" tab and entering a keyword search for such terms as "Hopewell," or "Ohio" easily locates photographs of many Ohio pieces both common and rare. A search can also be narrowed by using such features as the "image only" preference or by links to related categories.



18th Annual Ripley, Ohio Prehistoric Artifact Show



Where: Ripley Senior High School

Date: February 20th, 2011

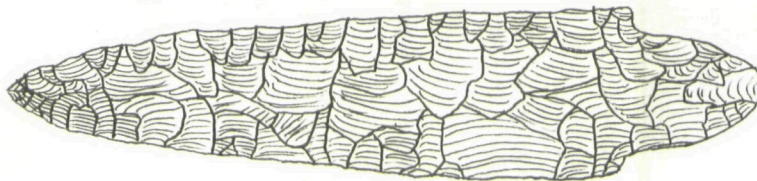
Time: 8:00 - 4:00

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Directions: Ripley Sr. High School located on Route 52 in Brown County, Ohio. 50 M East of Cincinnati. 62 M West of Portsmouth. Set up begins at 7:30. To reserve tables or obtain additional information, please contact Jon Dickinson at 513-509-7420. Directions and further information posted on www.prehistoricartifacts.com.